

Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures
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SOMETIMES a simple phrase powerfully encapsulates the drama of countless struggles. At our first meeting in Tokyo in May 1990, Dr. Bricall, then rector of the University of Barcelona, Spain, declared, "Liberty illuminates all — that is the spirit of our university." His words rang with deep sentiment and conviction.

Barcelona is the capital of Spain's autonomous Catalonia region—an area full of light, nurtured by the sun and breezes of the Mediterranean. It is a region of grape arbors, olive groves, rich birdlife, fields of waving golden wheat and mountain ranges capped with brilliant white snow. It is also the home of the famous Catalan round dance, the *sardana*, where all join hands in a circle like a beautiful flower.

Perhaps because of its natural wealth, Catalonia's history has been one of resisting successive invasions. The people of Catalonia have had to fight to preserve their culture and their homeland. Sometimes they fought against France; at other times, they battled against other regions of Spain.

The University of Barcelona was founded in 1450. From its inception, it has been a stronghold of Catalan culture. The university was shut down in 1714, however, because it resisted the Spanish Bourbon central government, which did not recognize Catalan autonomy. After a fourteen-month resistance struggle that had involved all of Catalonia, Barcelona fell to the outsiders and the University of Barcelona was forcibly removed to a tiny village in the mountains. The university did not return to the city for 130 years.

We only realize how precious liberty is after we have lost it. But by then it is too late.

Perhaps the worst times that Catalonia has faced were during and after the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39—a military revolt against the new democratic Spanish Republic, which had been established after the fall of the monarchy. The Second Republic of Spain, which had begun with such high hopes, was destroyed by the fascist troops led by Francisco Franco (1892–1975), with military assistance from Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and Fascist Italy's Benito Mussolini. They crushed the young republic that had pulsed with a vibrant culture.

AS I'm sure many of you will recall, the 1992 Olympic Games were held in Barcelona. But perhaps less well known today is another Olympics half a century earlier—the legendary Barcelona Olympiad organized to protest the Berlin Olympic Games hosted by Nazi Germany. It was proposed by people who opposed the exploitation of the world of sport by nations who discriminated on the basis of belief or religious faith—like Nazi Germany. They were determined to purify the noxious atmosphere that had been created, by planting millions of fragrant blooms of peace and goodwill throughout the world.

On July 18, 1936, on the eve of the Olympiad's scheduled opening, the great

cellist and conductor Pablo Casals (1876–1973), a native of Barcelona, was leading the final rehearsal of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in preparation for the ceremonies the following day. During the rehearsal, a messenger handed him a note informing him that a fascist military revolt was expected in the city that night. He was instructed to cancel the rehearsal and to allow the musicians to leave immediately. Casals made this announcement to his musicians. He asked them whether they wanted to leave or remain to finish the rehearsal. Indeed, they might never meet again. As the chorus sang the well-loved lyrics, “All mankind are sworn brothers where thy gentle wings abide,” Casals’ eyes filled with tears and he could no longer see the score. Outside, meanwhile, citizens were building barricades.¹

The republic believed in the power of culture, but its principles were about to be crushed under the boots of soldiers. What a tragedy!

The influential Spanish philosopher, educator and author Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) had initially supported the military revolt, but later came to bitterly regret his stance after experiencing firsthand the fascists’ inhumanity. During a ceremony at the University of Salamanca, of which Unamuno was rector, a military general shouted, “Down with intellectuals!” Rector Unamuno replied quietly from the lectern:

This is the temple of the intellect. And I am its high priest. It is you who profane its sacred precincts. You will win, because you have more than enough brute force. But you will not convince. For to convince, you need to persuade. And in order to persuade, you would need what you lack: Reason and Right in the struggle.”²

Unamuno was placed under house arrest and died two months later.

The ability to gain people’s support and understanding is the pride of intelligence, while force and power are the tools of barbarianism. When a university permits even the slightest hint of authoritarianism to taint its organization, the university itself becomes the violator of its very own “temple of the intellect.”

This is not only true of universities. All leaders have a responsibility to explain things explicitly to the people and to win their acceptance. The leader who has not grasped that truth is already out-of-date.

The entire world watched as the war between brute force and culture was being waged. Many famous writers went to Spain. André Malraux, with whom I carried on dialogues, recorded his experience in Spain in his novel *L’Espoir* (Hope). He voiced his protest against everything that crushed the hopes of the people, especially the attempt of politicians to extend their dominion even to the human spirit.³ Simone Weil scrutinized human destiny amid the tragic bloodletting, and George Orwell, while exposing the deceptions of political leaders, spoke of creating a crystalline spirit that refused to despair.

YOUNG people also came from many countries to fight on the Republican side

against Franco's Nationalist forces, moved by a great progressive cause that concerned all humanity. This international brigade of volunteers was praised as being as heroic as the warriors of Homer's *Illiad*. But as the days went by, defeat loomed. Even so, the Republic looked to the future. French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry came upon a little "school" not far from the Madrid front, in the shade of a small wall on a low hill a half-mile from a trench.⁴ A corporal stood there with a poppy in his hand, teaching a group of unshaven soldiers a lesson in botany. The hope that a new dawn of human history could be created through education shone brightly there, in the very midst of the war. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Ernest Hemingway wrote: "We cannot destroy them [the fascists]. But we can educate the people so that they will fear fascism and recognize it as it appears and combat it."⁵

The fall of Barcelona grew near. Air strikes continued mercilessly, and people began to evacuate the city. In such desperate times, what did the University of Barcelona do? It decided to pay tribute to outstanding cultural achievement by conferring an honorary doctorate on Pablo Casals. The faculty gathered for the award ceremony at the risk of their own lives, while sending their families to safety. There was no time to have the diploma printed, so it was written by hand. It was a modest ceremony, observed against a background of exploding shells. But it was a solemn ceremony of great historical importance, because it marked the refusal of the University of Barcelona to submit to brute force.

The city fell. In January and February of 1939, the refugees from Barcelona crossed the snowbound Pyrenees to reach safety in France. Between 400,000 to half a million people are thought to have fled along that route. It was like a journey, one poet wrote, from one death to another. In the early phase of the evacuation, there was no proper food and water in the hastily arranged refugee camps, and the weak soon died. Some died grasping a handful of earth from the villages they had left behind.

To these Catalan people, the soil of their native land represented their beloved homeland itself.

Lluís Companys i Jover (1882 –1940), the president of an autonomous Catalonia, was among the exiles. Later, when France was invaded and occupied by the Nazis, he was turned over to the fascist authorities of the homeland from which he had fled. He was tortured and condemned to death. As he stood before the firing squad, he quietly removed his shoes and socks. He wanted to die with both feet touching the ground of his homeland. When the white handkerchief at his breast had been dyed red with his blood, he collapsed. With his last breath he whispered, "For Catalonia!"

Who, at that moment, was the victor, who the vanquished? The murdering dictator or the patriot who was shot?

The people of Catalonia have a passionate love for their land, which had given birth to a culture that they were determined to keep alive, even if it meant dying to do so. It is a land that has produced many creative geniuses—Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, Antoni Gaudí. The blooms of a rich humanity open to all the world—not a narrow nationalism—were nourished in the earth of

Catalonia.

Education is to ignite a flame. When teachers burn with a passion for the truth, the desire to learn will be ignited in their students' hearts. When teachers are excited about culture and beauty, the creativity of their students will leap up like a bright flame. What is vital is whether teachers have something in their hearts that they really want to teach their students beyond all other considerations—even if they receive no remuneration, social recognition or special privileges. And also whether the students have a thirst for knowledge and learning within themselves.

CREATIVE individuals capable of directing the course of the future are born out of truly challenging and inspiring teacher-student relationships. If all we do is cram fragmented lumps of information into students' heads, we'll only produce specialists with no human character, like robots. The chaos of our society today is a clear testament to, and a warning of, the terrifying consequences of such a soulless education conducive only to the creation of a select intellectual elite.

After the Civil War, the people of Catalonia were even forbidden to speak their own language, Catalan, in public. When an entire people are not permitted to use their own words, their very humanity is being denied. The long, long winter of Catalonia continued.

In 1977, when limited autonomy was granted to Catalonia, the 78-year-old Josep Tarradellas (1899–1988), one of the leaders of the exiled government, returned to his country forty years after he had crossed the Pyrenees. The city of Barcelona rang with cheers, and the Catalan flag waved in its streets. He assumed the post as president of the provisional government of Catalonia.

Before becoming rector of the University of Barcelona, Rector Bricall was a director of the same provisional government. He appreciated the new spring of liberty.

Among the members of the international volunteer brigades was a young British poet called John Cornford, who fought and lost his life in the Spanish Civil War. In one of his poems, he cries out: "O understand before too late / Freedom was never held without a fight."⁵

In Japan, our liberty may not be threatened by a specific dictator; rather, it is threatened by the cowardice of our leaders who merely follow the status quo without making any effort to change it. That is why we need to foster people with backbone who do not passively follow events but actively create the future.

Dr. Bricall is vice president of the Standing Conference of Rectors, Presidents, and Vice Chancellors of the European Universities. "At our conference," Dr. Bricall commented, "we agreed that today's universities are a miniature of what our nations will be like in the future. It is in the universities that the society of the future is projected."

What can we see in our present universities? Are the creative fires burning in them? Is love for the people burning there? □

1. Cf: Robert Baldock, Pablo Casals (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1992), p. 154.
2. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd., 1961), p. 355.
3. André Malraux, *L'Espoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 464.
4. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Terre des hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 176.
5. Ernest Hemmingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 208.
6. *Understand the Weapon, Understand the Wound: Selected Writings of John Cornford*, ed. Jonathan Galassi (Manchester: Carcanet New Press Ltd., 1976) p. 40.

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